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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 002115

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: ISTANBUL POLICE CLOSE PATRIARCHATE PRESS CENTER
THEN RELENT

REF: ISTANBUL 2081

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Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

This message has been coordinated with Embassy Ankara.

11. (SBU) Summary: On November 27, Istanbul police briefly shut down a press center organized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate at a local hotel. Press arrangements for the Papal visit to the Patriarchate had been the subject of some dispute earlier in November (reftel) but both Patriarchate staff and Turkish government officials had indicated that the furor over "accreditation" had been resolved. The closure order appears to have been caused by sensitivity within the Istanbul Governor's office over the use of the term "Ecumenical Patriarchate" in registration documents at the center. End summary.

12. (SBU) A member of the Archons of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America contacted us on November 27 to report that police had declared an off-site press center run by the Patriarchate "illegal" and ordered it closed. Patriarchate staff told us that they had contracted with the hotel several weeks in advance of the November 29-30 Papal visit to Istanbul to provide ballroom space for use by visiting press as a filing center. According to Patriarchate staff, Government of Turkey representatives contacted them on November 24 and offered to provide funding for the filing center in exchange for control over the venue. The Patriarchate said "thanks but no thanks" to the GOT offer and continued with their plans.

13. (SBU) The press center opened on the morning of November 27 and functioned as planned for several hours, according to Patriarchate staff. In the early afternoon the police arrived and told press center organizers that the center had to close. According to press center organizers the police first indicated that the center was "illegal" because it was accrediting members of the press, a function that the GOT was already performing. The organizers explained that the center was not accrediting press, but simply registering press members who apply to use the filing center to limit numbers for occupancy levels and fire safety concerns. The press center communications director assured the police that press center registration in no way supersedes GOT accreditation. At this point the police pointed to registration badges that read "Papal Voyage to the Ecumenical Patriarchate" and indicated that the badges "created confusion" through the reference to the "Ecumenical Patriarchate", a title that the GOT does not recognize. Contacts at the General Directorate of Media and Information indicate that particular sensitivity

at the Istanbul Governor's office over the ecumenical phraseology prompted the police inquiry.

14. (SBU) We later found out from General Directorate of Media and Information contacts that the GOT realized somewhat late in the game that they needed a press center to support the Papal visit. The Foreign Ministry instructed Media and Information staff to negotiate with the Patriarchate to take control of the press center. Media and Information seemed to believe that they would be able to take charge of the press center when it opened on November 27. However, Media and Information staff appear to have abandoned this effort and the press center is currently operational under Ecumenical Patriarchate direction.

15. (SBU) The afternoon's events unfolded in front of dozens of members of the press who were there to register at the press center. Not surprisingly, almost all major Turkish newspapers covered the altercation in the next day's editions. Most of the articles claimed that the reason for the attempted closure was the Istanbul Governor's office objection to a second "accreditation" and noted that once it was explained that the Ecumenical Patriarchate was only registering media for use of the press center and not providing a second accreditation, the center was reopened. Several articles also mentioned that the center was using the term "Ecumenical Patriarchate" on its materials, but they did not indicate that sensitivity towards this phraseology was a motivation for the police action.

16. (SBU) Comment: Nomenclature can be a neuralgic issue in Turkey and the GOT has long refused to recognize the ecumenical nature of the Ecumenical Patriarch. However, attempting to shut down an operating press center -- in front of what organizers described as "hundreds of television cameras and other reporters" -- is likely to draw international attention to the Ecumenical Patriarch's treatment by the GOT in a way that rebounds very negatively

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for the GOT. End Comment.
JONES